A HANDBOOK OF SHORT STORY WRITING

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A HANDBOOK OF SHORT STORY WRITING

BY

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and
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The material of this little book was first given extended presentation in a series of lectures on short story writing at the Booklovers' Shop in Pittsburgh, and has been amplified in courses at the State University of Iowa. It is, however, as much the product of my experience as editor of *The Midland,* since its foundation in 1915, as of my teaching.

I have not sought to prepare a handbook for commercial writers, since many such books are already in the market. The present volume approaches the writing of short stories solely as a matter of artistic expression. Its purpose is to suggest concrete means and methods for the beginner in the practice of this art.

I wish to express my gratitude, for introduction to some of the principles I have tried to present and for some of the illustrative material, to my former teachers and associates: C. F. Ansley, Florence Livingston Joy, and Percival Hunt; and, for assistance in the reading of proofs and for suggestions, to my colleagues at the State University of Iowa: Frank Luther Mott, George Carver, and Walter J. Muilenburg.

JOHN T. FREDERICK.

April 15, 1924.

SHORT STORY WRITING

CHAPTER I

AIM AND MOTIVE

At the beginning of any systematic study, however informal, it seems desirable for us to ask ourselves what it is that we are trying to do and why we are trying to do it. I am aware that this is not always easy. Indeed, if full and satisfactory answers to these two questions were required of all of us who teach, it is likely that the curricula of educational institutions would undergo a notable shrinkage. Nevertheless, I persist in the opinion that some attempt in this direction is desirable.

We are confronted at once, then, by the formidable question: What is a short story? — a question the answer to which consumes from perhaps a tenth to as much as a fourth of the total content of most of the books in the field. I must confess promptly that I am not excited by this matter of definition. In aesthetic matters especially, it seems to me, academic and formal definitions are as a rule both ineffectual and trivial; and I am fully convinced that in the study of short story writing too much stress has been laid upon them.

Forty years ago Brander Matthews defined the "short-story" in a set of terms which laid emphasis upon form — structure and manner — and took little

account of anything else. It has been the misfortune of the short story in America that this inadequate definition has been amplified, elaborated, and insisted upon by most subsequent writers on the subject. Definitions in terms of certain formal elements have led to the assumption that all short stories which possess these qualities are good and all which lack them are bad, and that the best short story is that which most brilliantly exemplifies the technical qualities referred to. The result has been that very little approval has been forthcoming for vitality and significance of material, or for sincerity and integrity of purpose, unless these have happened to be poured into the conventional mold.

Against the rigid maintenance of these artificial standards our most significant writers have been mutinous. (Witness, for a single example, Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat.") In our own days this mutiny has assumed the proportions of a definite revolt, of which such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Ruth Suckow, Thyra Samter Winslow, and Waldo Frank are leaders.

The time has come, certainly, for a shift of emphasis. The aim of short story writing must no longer be defined in terms of approximation of artificial canons of form and method, but primarily in terms of the sincerity of the writer and the significance of his material. Probably the reason the artificial canons have been so enthusiastically propagated by academic critics is the fact that they are easily taught. Almost

anybody can present and apply a series of artificial doctrines of form, and almost anybody can learn to make something which superficially conforms to the stipulated patterns. But results indicate that this is not the way to teach, or to learn, really to write. If the student is to gain from his work the development and enrichment which the conscientious practice of an art alone can give, he must approach the work from the standpoint of the significance of his material and the sincerity of his own response to it. It seems safest, then, to avoid all the dangers of elaborate artificial definitions, and to say simply that what we aim to produce is a brief narrative of significant human experience. Whether this is or is not a "short story" is less important than some other things in the universe.

More valuable than the scientific definition of the aim of our work is a conscientious examination of our motive in undertaking it. Why do we want to write short stories? The answer to this question seems to me profoundly important. In reading the manuscripts which have been submitted to *The Midland* during the past ten years, I have had to ask myself over and over: What was the motive which lay behind the making of this story? Why was it written? Was it because the writer had a story to tell, because some phase of human experience had so laid hold upon him that he could not but render it into words with such craft as he could command? Or was it because he desired to obtain a cent a word?

I have no fault to find with the writers of stories of the latter class, nor with the editors who print them. So far as the editors are concerned, they are primarily business men, with the profits of their employers to safeguard; and most of them publish just as many sound and significant stories as the taste of their readers and the talent of their contributors will permit. Neither, on the other hand, are the makers of the stories to be blamed; for they too are business men, manufacturing specific products for specific demands. This is a business as honorable and as useful as many another, its main disadvantages being its uncertainty and the arduous apprenticeship it requires. The only persons who are culpable in this situation are those, usually critics and teachers of short story writing, who confuse the young writer by telling him that learning the "art" of the short story consists in mastering a number of the customs and devices of the business of commercial writing. As a matter of fact, writing for the *Red Book* or the *Saturday Evening Post* has little more to do with literature than illustrating a Sears Roebuck catalogue has to do with painting. The editors and the writers (as a rule) are either more intelligent or more honest than the critics and teachers referred to. They do not talk about art.

Nor do I mean to deny the virtues of hard cash. Once we have written a story, it is expedient for most of us to try intelligently to sell that story. I have a great respect for checks, the larger the better. But I do believe profoundly that nearly every man or

woman who undertakes the study of short story writing with a motive purely or primarily mercenary makes a serious mistake.

In the first place, the chances in the business, as a business, are poor. The alleged earnings of certain writers of great popular renown have been falsely emphasized by those "teachers" who seek to attract students to commercial courses in short story writing which are highly profitable — to the teachers. As a matter of fact, I venture to say that fewer people are actually making a living by writing short stories in America today than by teaching others to write them. For one neophyte who eventually sells a tale to the *Ladies' Home Journal,* there are a hundred who are never heard from, or whose best luck is the meager check of some wood pulp monthly. If you want to make money, I should say to the aspirant, you had much better undertake the merchandising of woolen underwear or the repairing of Fords. These vocations are easier to learn and less overcrowded, and the average returns are far higher. Also, I have an old-fashioned notion that you have a better chance of saving your soul.

Does this mean that there is no object in studying the short story, in trying to learn to write it? For some I suppose it does. For others, capable of perceiving immaterial values, it most emphatically does not. No art diligently and understandingly pursued will fail to reward the student, least of all the art of fiction. For the genuine student of the short story

there are returns so important and so assured, quite independent of the favor of the editors of commercial magazines, that I venture to explicate them in some detail.

In the first place, study of the short story demands of us that we shall observe our world. Places and people must become vivid in our experience if we are to set them down on paper successfully. Most of us live insulated lives, almost totally devoid of conscious response to our environment. We walk down a street, but it is A — street for us, not a living picture of grey elms and trodden grass and old brown houses. We converse with this man and that without becoming alive to faces, to expressions, even to clothes. An opaque shell of insensitiveness, of the accumulated habit of not noticing, surrounds us. To a large extent, this shell can be broken by conscious effort. As we practice observation of people and places in our effort to become able to write short stories, our experience of the world becomes richer and more vivid.

Even more important than this is the demand which short story writing makes upon us to understand people — to perceive their problems, to feel the forces which are brought to bear upon them, and to share in their emotions. It is the first duty of the short story writer to project his personality into the experiences of others — to learn to feel as they feel, to see life as they see it. If he can do this easily and completely, he has one of the qualifications of the great artist. And even though in his effort to write he can achieve only

spasmodic and incomplete identification of his experience with that of others, he yet has won something of insight and sympathy which may contribute inestimably to his happiness in the ordinary relations of life, and which may even help him to some measure of understanding of himself.

Finally, even the humblest apprentice to the craft of story writing will find that if he has worked in the true spirit of the craftsman he has gained something of the craftsman's capacity to appreciate his masters. Just as a trained musician can hear more in Bach or Beethoven than the average man, so one who has himself tried to set down human experience in the refractory medium of words can more fully than before enjoy the work of the great writers, not only of the short story but of the novel and the drama as well.

To live in a brighter, more intimate, more vivid world; to know people, and perhaps oneself, more understandingly; to read Conrad and Chehov and the rest with fuller enjoyment than before — these are the motives which should justify a study of short story writing. If these are not enough, let's shut the book and drop the course.

CHAPTER II

THE WRITER'S TOOLS

Dependence upon *things* is one of the perennial frailties of human nature. We must have medicines to cure our ills, churches in which to worship God, marriage licenses approved by the state — with what degree of effectuality in many cases, indication is not lacking. And here am I, ministering to the craving for objects, for paraphernalia, for traps and baggage, by writing as the second in this book a chapter about *things*. What weapons shall I take with me on this Great Adventure, breathlessly demands the Young Writer; what improved and patented salt-shakers wherewith to sprinkle the tail feathers of inspiration? And complaisantly I make reply.

Books, naturally, are a part of the equipment of any one who sets out to make books. But of books which "tell how" — books on short story writing (including this one) — I have little good to say. At best, they may afford to certain students slight stimuli, or give minute and particular guidance in methods of procedure; at worst, they may be gravely, even disastrously, harmful. So far I have found only three that I care to commend, and of these two are treatises on the historical development of the short story: Dr.

Henry Seidel Canby's *The Short Story in English* and Edward J. O'Brien's *The Advance of the American Short Story.* The other is a jeremiad of great eloquence addressed primarily to teachers of this gentle art: *Short Story Writing, an Art or a Trade,* by N. Bryllion Fagin.

Much more important, and nearly certain to be helpful, are books of short stories themselves. I have (as the editor of one) little use for volumes of selections, or short story anthologies, so far as the student of the art is concerned. What the student needs to do in his reading is to observe the methods of a master in dealing with all kinds of people and situations. For that purpose only a comparatively full presentation of the master's work is adequate. Further, I believe that most students will gain more from such a study of a fairly recent writer of unquestioned importance than from one of earlier times. Hence I recommend Hardy, Kipling, Stevenson, Chehov, rather than Poe and Hawthorne; and of writers now producing, Conrad, Galsworthy, Bunin, Sherwood Anderson, Thyra Samter Winslow. To these I would add Katherine Mansfield. There are many good stories in Edward J. O'Brien's American anthologies — *Best Short Stories of 1915,* etc.; fewer in his *Best English Short Stories of 1922,* etc., and in the collection called *Georgian Stories;* and fewer still in the *O. Henry Memorial Volumes.* In the first appendix to this handbook I have assembled a list of titles and publishers for the student who is interested in the books

to which I have referred. This list includes volumes which contain all stories referred to in the text.

Books are a part of the writer's equipment for his task, and the study of them is a part of the task itself; but the crucial moments in his development as a writer are those unconsidered hours of every day in which he closes the books, shuts the door of the library, and goes out among men. The most valuable aids he can bring to his task are alert and accurate perceptions, "an eye to see and an ear to hear"; response to fragrances and flavors; awareness of the loom and push of hills, the stress of walls.

The student has before him the tremendous problem of transferring an experience, built of his observation and intuition, to the reader of his story — of adding to the experience of that reader something which was not his before. To achieve this with the force of reality, the student must himself perceive reality. He must see more vividly than he has seen before, hear more keenly. He must note and remember the gestures of people, the details of their costumes, intonations, facial expressions. He must be attentive to the colors, shapes, smells, tastes, tactual and muscular sensations of objects and places. He must intensify his own response to the objective world, at the same time clarifying and commanding it.

In his first effort to transfer to another an experience which he himself has found vivid, the student will become aware of the relation between this effort and his supply of words; and he will begin the game

which will last as long as he writes — that of finding the one perfect word for the impression which he wishes to convey. Here perhaps he will first become aware of the need for a notebook — as well as a good dictionary, and possibly a thesaurus. Not all writers, to be sure, use notebooks. Some are able to depend upon memory, conscious and subconscious, to supply them with details as they write. But for nearly all of us records of observation are highly valuable. The notebook should be easily portable, easily used under all conditions, and of such a nature as to permit the rearrangement and filing of its contents. A packet of small index-cards — 3 x 5 or 4 x 6 — may serve as well as anything else. Into this notebook will go the student's experiments and explorations in the search of words. It is worth while to engage from time to time in the effort to find adequate expression for objects and actions immediately observed: That whistle now sounding — what verb will make a reader hear it? That girl's toque — what is its color against the factory wall? This may suggest to the student the possibility of investigating his vocabulary in relation to certain important matters: How many color words has he — how many tones and shades of red can he distinguish, for example? How many verbs can he command for the simple task of telling how a man crosses a street?

The student's notebook, however, will contain more than exercises in diction. It should give place for fragments of articulated description — a bridge at

night, a hotel lobby — such as might be needed in stories. It should contain snatches of conversation, accidental glimpses of people and their relations — a dispute in a restaurant, the titles of a bundle of books on the arm of a straphanger. (See Appendix II.)

Finally, the notebook should give service when the student finds his mind fertile with "ideas for stories," as it sometimes will be. There are hours when for some obscure reason story situations, bits of finished phrasing for projected narratives, and even fully developed plans will appear in the writer's consciousness, seemingly spontaneously and often in rapid succession. At such times a notebook which is always carried and which can be used under any circumstances is invaluable. It should afford means of preserving these germinal ideas and vaguely planned narratives, under whatever circumstances they may come; for such harvestings of the subconscious are by no means confined to propitious hours and places. In the chill of the next morning's daylight most of the treasured items will be found valueless; but a few will repay many times the effort made in their preservation.

I need not add to this listing of necessary equipment the obvious quantities of large and immaculate sheets of paper, the free-flowing pen or typewriter or (my own preference) a gross of soft pencils. Nor shall I dwell here upon the most important of all the possessions which the student must bring to his work; for the power to feel and the eagerness to express — these are a part of the student himself.

CHAPTER III

THEMES AND PLANS

The process of finding a story varies widely for different writers, and for the same writer in different cases. For one student the most productive sources of short story ideas may be the daily newspapers, with their announcement of the sensational and the dramatic in human affairs. Another may find his stories growing up always about individual men and women, some of whom he may have seen only once and then imperfectly. Generally speaking, however, the best stories are those which spring most spontaneously from the writer's own experience. Some incident or circumstance in his own life, or in that of some one he knows more or less intimately, will arrest his attention. And in the effort to record, to express, this fraction of experience, with its preparatory and subsequent circumstances, he writes a story.

Let us note well that word "experience," the keystone in what of definition of the short story we have attempted. It means the actual living through an event or succession of events. The element of progression is inherent in it. It implies dynamic, not static, relations of men and women to one another and to their general environment. In our search for

stories we must see to it that we find what is truly experience — a series of related events or happenings, resulting either in change or in reaffirmation of existing human relationships, conditions, or ideas.

The kind of experience we choose will be a result of our temperament and of our opportunity for observation. It should be apparent that the young writer who seeks to achieve work of literary significance must begin with the life he knows. But any environment offers infinite variety — the beautiful and the grotesque — the heroic and the comic. How to choose from this wealth? It is my belief that any significant experience of normal human beings is valid literary material. By significant experience I mean that which has any considerable effect upon, or affords any noteworthy expression of, character in its ordinary sense. From the number of "normal human beings" I would exclude only those definitely insane or of specific mental deficiency. Such persons appear of necessity in certain stories, in their effect upon and relations to normal persons; and the passage of a mind from sanity to insanity may afford the basis for a story. But psychopathology in and for itself does not seem to me to afford material for literature.

In this whole matter the student who undertakes to write for literary rather than commercial ends enjoys a freedom which would be impossible were he aiming at a market: of necessity the editors of commercial magazines reject, in deference to the sensi-

bilities and prejudices of their readers, most stories with tragic endings and all stories dealing honestly with certain phases of undeniably significant experience. In the choice of his material, however, the young writer will do well to curb his ambition to some extent. In one's first stories it may seem advisable, on the whole, to deal with not quite the greatest extremes of human passion. Indeed, the young writer is most fortunate who can perceive the literary possibilities in the everyday affairs of ordinary men and women, and can enjoy the effort to reveal the significance of seemingly commonplace material.

For some young writers the matter of finding a story is the easiest step in the whole process; the difficulties come later. For many, whose final results may be quite as satisfactory, the discovery of the initial situation is very difficult. The next few paragraphs are addressed to students of this latter class.

For the beginner it is often worth while to choose a more or less abstract central dramatic situation for a story, and then to fit characters and incidents to it from his own experience. Most significant stories can be reduced to a simple abstract statement of theme or situation. (See Appendix III.) A first formal exercise for the student may well consist of the analysis of good stories for these central ideas, or dramatic situations.

Having stated to his satisfaction the themes of half-a-dozen good stories, the student may choose one of these themes, or another of his own making, and begin

to fit story material to the idea. Let us say that he chooses the theme, "the older generation is reluctant to yield authority to the younger." Let us say further that the student's life has been spent in a middle western community of farms and small towns. Has he not observed the retired farmer who is still trying to manage his farm, and clashing with his son over the details of crops and stockraising? Or perhaps in a city he knows the small store in which an ambitious younger partner contests in behalf of newer methods the merchandising formulæ of forty years. Or perhaps in a household he has seen a mother reluctant to concede to her woman-daughter any capacity for important tasks or independent decisions.

With some one of these concrete situations as an expression of his theme, the student may proceed to the preparation of an outline of his projected story. This outline we may call a "plan." Some writers never commit the outline to paper, preferring to hold the whole mass of material in the mind until the time has come for actual composition of the story. Most of us, however, will find it definitely helpful to write down our plans. We may adopt either a simple synopsis form, like the familiar "what has gone before" at the beginning of an instalment of a serial: the barest and most compact statement of the actual events of the story. Or we may make what we may call a scenario, indicating characters, settings, and incidents with some degree of fullness. (See Appendix III.) What is essential, in either case, is that

we shall get before us in tangible form the sequence of events of the story we are planning, from beginning to end.

This plan may now be studied with a view to its improvement. It must be remembered that the success or failure of our story will depend, in the last analysis, upon the adequacy with which it transfers experience to the reader. This means, since the short story *is* short, that the chance of success lies in the direction of credibility, simplicity, and unity; for the experience which is improbable, highly complicated, or widely extensive or varied, lays upon the short story form a burden too great for it to bear, at least in the hands of most amateurs. The greatest service which the plan can render to the writer is the chance it affords for the recognition and correction of elements which would weaken the story.

The matter of credibility in a short story is one which it is often hard for the writer to judge for himself, and which depends so largely upon details that it can seldom be accurately predicted by others while a story is in its outline form. What seems highly improbable in the plan may attain full credibility in the finished manuscript. Nevertheless, an examination of the plan with the question of credibility in mind will at least afford an index to the portions of the narrative in which conviction is likely to be most difficult of attainment; and will indicate oftentimes a rearrangement of incidents or the introduction of new material.

Turning now to the matter of simplicity, we may profitably examine our plan with certain specific questions in mind. First of all, we may note that a story is made up of "incidents," just as a play is made up of scenes. An incident consists of a narrative of continuous action, without lapse of time — without, in other words, a gap in the sequence of events. In this sense, some stories are composed of single incidents, since the narrative is continuous, without interruption by lapse of time, from the beginning to the end of the story: if such stories were presented dramatically, the curtain would not be lowered until the end. On the other hand, stories such as Ruth Suckow's "Other Peoples' Ambitions" and Agnes Mary Brownell's "Doc Greer's Practice," which present the experience of many years, are composed of a very large number of incidents, connected by generalized narration.

Most typical short stories, however, are composed of from five to ten incidents (or scenes), which are more or less closely connected in time and place. The student should analyse a number of stories with this matter in view, discovering for himself how many incidents are given, and how the transition between these is accomplished. He should then consider critically the plan for his own story, seeking to eliminate unnecessary incidents, and to provide for the possibility of simple and effective transitions between the incidents.

A single incident may, in a short story, involve

two or more settings: if a conversation begins in a drawing-room, and the persons conversing pass into the garden without any interval of time, it is regarded as a single incident, although the setting changes. Hence a consideration of the number of incidents employed, and their relation, leads naturally to an examination of the plan with reference to the matter of settings.

First, we may ask, have we more scenes or settings than are necessary for the events of this story? Our purpose is the transfer of experience to the reader; and therefore each scene or setting involves a definite task of description. It will be evident that the use of a large number of settings is likely to result in lack of effectiveness in the story: if we describe each fully, we occupy too much of the limited space of our form; if we describe too briefly, we lose reality and conviction in the whole narrative. I remember a story once submitted to *The Midland*, admirable in some ways, which bore the exhausting burden of seven wholly different settings for important incidents: an English residence in Hong-Kong, the saloon of a passenger steamer, a San Francisco waterfront resort, a Pullman observation car, a Minnesota village home, a lawyer's office in Chicago, and a cemetery! It is needless to say that the effort to realize for the reader all these contrasting backgrounds effectively stifled the narrative interest of the story.

Of course, separate settings which are a part of one general background may be much more easily pre-

sented than those which are wholly foreign to one another. In the description of different rooms in a house, for example — or of a home, a store, and the postoffice in a village — each helps the other. It is also true that a single marked contrast in setting may be highly desirable. But in the examination of his plan the student will do well to reduce his settings to as small a number as possible, retaining only those which are unquestionably essential. Oftentimes it will be found that two incidents originally thought of as occurring in different places may as well have a common background, while other incidents may be dispensed with entirely in the interest of simplicity.

The characters of the story, too, may be scrutinized while it is still in the tentative outline form, with a view to the ideal of simplicity. We may ask whether any characters are superfluous — whether we have assumed any unnecessary and unfruitful obligations of realization of people for the reader — and whether the whole natures of our characters and all elements in their relations are clearly established in our own minds.

The examination of the characters as they figure in a story plan naturally leads to the last of our three tests, that of unity. Here it is very foolish to be dogmatic. There are stories of great power and beauty which resist the application of any briefly stated doctrine of unity; and I have already made clear my distrust of rules and formulæ in this whole matter of creative writing. Yet it may be safely said, with

the foregoing qualification, that most short stories are characterized by a high degree of unity in the experience which they present, and that the student should test his story plans most carefully for this quality.

The unified impression given by most short stories is due to the fact that they are concerned primarily with one character, or with one common experience of several characters. The student must ask himself: What experience do I want to transfer? With what character am I most concerned? Whose story is this? When these questions have been answered, the plan should be tested incident by incident with reference to the centrality of character or effect thus decided upon. Often the student will find that he has let his interest shift from one character to another somewhere in the sequence of events, or that he has included characters or incidents which contradict and nullify the effect he desires. In some stories such shifts or contradictions are unavoidable, even desirable. But for his first story the student should prepare a plan which is dominated by a single character or a single highly unified experience. He should recast or revise until this unity is attained. And if he finds a plan which is not amenable to such revision, he should discard it or postpone its development.

In concluding this discussion it may be well to note that no amount of surgery, osteopathy, or chiropractic applied to a story plan will correct the unfortunate results of the absence of a valid idea to

begin with. That "fraction of experience" of our first paragraph is all-essential; and by this "experience" is meant something emotionally perceived with no small degree of acuteness. To write a story one must first live the story, imaginatively if not actually. He must be able to enter into this fragment of the great sum of human experience, and make it authentic in his own life. Rules and methods of procedure are at best but secondary; the capacity to see, to feel, to understand — and the thirst to make others see, feel, and understand — these are the first essentials. Let the student lack these, and volumes on technique will avail him little or nothing; let him possess these, and the rest will be added unto him.

CHAPTER IV

POINT OF VIEW

An examination of a story plan to determine whether or not it is unified in its emphasis upon its characters leads naturally to the consideration of the matter of point of view. This is one of the most important and most interesting of the problems which confront the young writer. Granted a given story-plan, a given sequence of events, it is necessary to decide what relation to the events will be assumed by the writer in presenting them to the reader. This relation is called point of view. The events may be narrated in the first person, either by one of the characters of the story or by an observer; the experience may be presented in the third person as that of some one of the characters, everything being given as he sees it and hears it; or, finally, the story may be told impersonally. (See Appendix IV.)

Usually the choice of point of view is inseparable from the choice of the story-theme itself and the development of the story-plan. As the plan grows, a given point of view is likely to become identified with it. But not infrequently the student will find it desirable to consider the matter of point of view objec-

tively, when the tentative plan is well advanced, trying to find the method of presenting the events which is most likely to prove satisfactory. For the beginner especially, it is often best to let the choice of point of view constitute a definite step in the writing process. We may therefore note some of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the several points of view which may be at our disposal in a given case, and the effects peculiar to each.

A story told in the first person is more likely to gain credence, other things being equal, than the same story told in any other way. It has the effect of a personal conversation. If we sit down with a friend and listen to a tale of his personal experience, the events have for us a large degree of immediacy, and become closely interwoven with our own experience. Our friend may omit details, he may take short cuts in his narrative, and he may neglect to prepare us for extraordinary occurrences; still, because of the personal element in the situation, the story attains great vividness and is likely to carry conviction. The same thing is true of the first person narrative in a printed story. It is for this reason that many tales of the supernatural or occult and many hair-raising adventure yarns are related in the first person.

There are, however, powerful objections to this method. Most of us have a certain natural, probably instinctive, dislike for the person who seems to us to boast of his achievements, or who is over ready to confide, to relate his more intimate experiences. This

repugnance extends to the printed page when a story is told in the first person, and makes the use of this method for much of the material of the modern character story well-nigh impossible. In the hands of the unskilful writer a first person narrative is all too likely to prejudice the reader, making him ill at ease because his habitual reticence has been violated.

There are, to be sure, methods of overcoming this objection and hence retaining the advantageous immediacy and vividness of the first person narrative without estranging the reader. One means is to let our first person narrator assume the attitude of a confessedly inferior or exceptional person, not amenable to the ordinary restrictions of normal men and women. This method is to be observed in Turgenev's "Diary of a Superfluous Man," where the disarming avowal of inferiority occurs in the very title. The same thing is to be observed in Sherwood Anderson's great story, "I'm a Fool." Another method of making acceptable the first person narration of intimate emotions and incidents is to place the narrator in some professional relationship to the characters and action of the story. This is illustrated by the innumerable first person stories professedly told by journalists, attorneys, clergymen, detectives, and other "respectable" disguises of the ingenious writer. Finally, the reader's objection to a first person narrative may be largely removed by presenting the events as a story within a story: by letting the speaker relate a narrative which some other person has told to him, either

reproducing it literally as told by that person, or expressing it in his own words with comment and amplification. The first variety of this method is illustrated by the Mulvaney stories of Kipling, in which the Irishman's yarns (in his own words) are related in the first person by the journalist to whom they have been told. Conrad employs certain variations of this method frequently, and in his hands it exhibits a quality which is rarely present in a story told in the first person: that of perspective, of the relation of the particular sequence of events which make up the story to the larger facts of life. The narrative in the first person, through its very intimacy and immediacy of appeal to the reader, is usually distorted in values. Its incidents are over-emphasized. It is a picture which is all foreground. But if the writer adopts as the teller a person of somewhat philosophical and reflective nature, like Conrad's Marlow, he may succeed in attaining admirable perspective, and relation of the particular experience of the story to human experience in general, without entirely sacrificing the vividness and convincingness usually associated with the first person narrative. Such a story within a story, however, involves obvious technical difficulties. It is hard to project an experience through two or more intermediaries. Even Conrad finds the burden well-nigh too much for him in such a tale as *Chance*. The young writer will do well, on the whole, to avoid the first person point of view in all its forms, and to choose the method which says " he

did this" or "he saw this done," rather than that which says "I did this" or "I tell this which was told to me."

The point of view most frequently adopted by the significant writers of the present day, and that in which most of our best stories are written, is that of a chief character in the story whose experience is presented in the third person. The sequence of events is related as it appears to that individual, his consciousness more or less rigidly defining the limits of what is given and what is not given. The greatest advantage of this method is the emphasis it lays upon character. If the writer's main purpose is to reveal the emotions and impulses of one person, this is his best method. In the use of this method the events are often less important and less interesting than the reaction to them of the character who affords the point of view. We are interested in the events because of the character, and through him.

Sometimes a story contains a sequence of events such that the presentation of all from the point of view of one chief character is inadvisable or impossible. The shift thus necessitated is by no means always a defect; but it constitutes a technical difficulty which the young writer will do well to avoid. Study of what the masters have done when confronted by the necessity of such a shift is the best means of learning how to accomplish it. But if the student finds that a story he is planning seems to necessitate a change in point of view, he should either recast the

plan in such a way as to avoid that necessity, or postpone his treatment of the story.

Many stories can better be told from the point of view of a minor character than from that of a major character. In this way the reader may come to know equally two or more people in the story without shift in point of view. Care should be taken, however, to avoid the attraction of too much interest to the minor character himself; for oftentimes such a character, used to afford point of view, diverts attention from the people or incidents of the story which it was the writer's intention to emphasize.

Finally, it is possible to tell a story in the third person without identifying the narrative with the point of view of any one character. The writer gives what happens in different places at the same time, and what is thought or felt by different people. This, commonly called the "omniscient" point of view, is perhaps best of all for stories in which the themes are particularly ambitious and significant, and in which, accordingly, the matter of perspective, of correct relation of the given segment of experience to life as a whole, is especially important. It is the more common method of the older writers of fiction, both of the short story and the novel. In their books, and in some modern work as well, the writer is likely to appear in his own person, to comment on his characters and on what happens to them, or to express his views on matters more or less related to the story. Such comment or interpretation is nearly always ob-

jectionable in the short story. The writer working in this form should regard it as his business to transcribe some significant bit of human experience, suppressing some phases and underlining others if he will, but refraining from comment or interpretation. The story so weak as to need footnotes had better remain unwritten.

But the omniscient method, with its impartial treatment of the several characters and its equal emphasis upon the various aspects of the given experience, is better adapted than any other to giving the reader a due sense of the significance of what is told, of its relation to his own life and to that of the race. The preference of Chehov for this method is in part responsible for the powerful impression which his stories have had on thoughtful readers. One of the finest modern stories in this point of view is Bunin's "The Gentleman from San Francisco." In the hands of such masters as Chehov and Bunin the short story told from the omniscient point of view gets as close to its characters as can be desired. But in the hands of the beginner this method often results in vagueness and lack of reality in the people of the story — a defect which can be most easily overcome by the employment of the point of view of one of these people. For the purposes of the student, then, the best point of view for practice work is in most cases that of a major or minor character of the story, the events being presented in the third person as observed or participated in by that character.

CHAPTER V

CHARACTERIZATION

A theme chosen and a plan perfected, the student faces the problem of actually writing down what he has to say. In the main, what he writes will be an attempt to make his reader see, know, and understand people — in other words, an effort toward characterization.

To make people live through words seems to me the most interesting undertaking in the world, and one of the most difficult. As he approaches this problem, the student will do well to consider the process by which impressions of people are formed in life, as a means of discovering the tools which are at his command. Let us suppose that I am a resident of a small midwestern town, and that a young physician comes there to take up his practice. Possibly first of all I shall get a glimpse of the newcomer on the street or in the drugstore, and his personal appearance will give me a preliminary and possibly vivid, but not necessarily accurate, impression of his personality. I may talk with the man, or listen to his conversation with others, and my first impression will be immediately amplified, corrected, or heightened, as I listen to his voice, note his words and idioms, and perhaps

gain some insight into his interests and opinions. Very soon my growing impression of the man will be affected by the opinions of others, expressed directly or indirectly. Later, I may visit his office or his home, and these places which are in some sense an expression of himself will help to characterize him for me. Finally, and in the course perhaps of extended acquaintance, my impression of his character will be stabilized through what the man does — through his conduct, his actions.

If, now, we summarize these steps, we shall discover that in the ordinary relations of men, impressions of character are formed through personal appearance, conversation, the impressions of others, the appearance of places intimately associated with the person in question, and action. Translating this into terms of the writer's craft, we may give our reader an impression of character through description, conversation, the attitude of others, place description, or action.

To these methods we may add two more, which are very necessary parts of our equipment, but which have less relation to the ordinary course of experience. The first of these is exposition. In endeavoring to make the reader aware that John Smith is an honest, likable, industrious fellow, we may simply say so in so many words, instead of presenting John Smith by description, conversation, and action in such a way as to make the reader realize that he possesses these qualities. Further, it is the writer's privilege to enter the mind of John Smith, telling the reader what is

there within as well as what is externally evident. This revelation of thoughts and motives may be termed introspection.

Each of the seven methods listed above may well be considered separately with reference to its limitations and possibilities.

Exposition

The simple statement of character in expository terms, without resort to the more concrete methods of conversation, action, etc., is often employed in the short story, particularly in the case of minor characters who play essential parts in the plan but whom it is not necessary for the reader to know well or to understand. The advantage of the method is its brevity, its economy. In a few words the reader gains an impression which it would take much longer to convey through conversation or any other concrete method. Hence exposition is adapted to the particular needs of the short story, and its use is much more often justified in this form than in the novel. The fundamental defect of the method is its lack of vividness, which frequently results in failure to convince. When the writer places before us the appearance of a person, or his conversation or actions, permitting us to form our own estimates of character from the data offered, the experience is analogous to that of real life, and our impressions have corresponding vividness and veracity. But if he asks us to take his word for

it that John Smith is honest, or that Jane Smith is lazy, we may acquiesce, but we are not interested or impressed. The method should be used sparingly, then, especially in the case of the major characters of a story. Its chief usefulness lies in the ease with which one may convey in this way information regarding the past lives of his characters — information which could be conveyed by no other means save conversation or introspection, and which would seem forced and unnatural if so presented.

Description

Personal description is a craft in itself, and should be practiced separately by the beginner by putting into his notebook descriptions of people he meets and sees — at least one every day. Some days may give him a dozen. In this practice work, the student should not aim at complete description. He should remember that in forming an image of a person, the reader is able to take much for granted. It is the writer's business to supply the particularizing, the individualizing details, and to express these in words so specific, so vivid, that they cannot fail to be seen distinctly. The notebook entries should be brief, then, composed of bold, attention-catching details, phrased as concretely as possible.

In choosing subjects for practice in personal description, however, the student should not choose by preference the exceptional, the abnormal or extraor-

dinary. Rather he should try to find the significant and individualizing details in the appearance of ordinary, everyday people. The notebook should not be a gallery of tramps, newsboys, and prostitutes; it should include a few bankers, cooks, grocers, laundrymen, even teachers and Sunday school superintendents.

Probably the first important consideration in relation to the technique of personal description is order. The earliest introduction of a character should give general suggestion of age, sex, and stature, together with one or two of such specific details as would normally be noted at first glance. Other specific details should be given later, in connection with conversation and action.

The student should remember that lighting is an integral part of every personal description. A face may be seen without any setting whatsoever — though usually place description enters more or less into the process of making a reader see a person. But because of a perhaps unreasonable law of optics one cannot see a face except by some specific and determinable light. Practice in personal description should, therefore, include some reference to lighting: noon glare on the pavement, the steady flow of soft light in a library reading room, the flare of a match.

As the young writer studies personal description in short stories he approves, he will find that descriptive details should be distributed, not massed. The natural impulse of many beginners is to reason in this fashion: I have John Smith to characterize

for my reader; very well, first I shall describe John Smith, and then I shall let him talk and work. The defect of this method is twofold. In the first place, if very many details of personal appearance are given at once, no matter how carefully they are arranged or how vividly phrased, the reader is unable to relate them properly and construct a vivid image. Further, in the conversation and action which follow such a massed description, the reader is likely to forget the appearance of the person who is talking and working. The better way is to give only two or three vivid details when first introducing a character, and to distribute others through conversation and action, as well as to reiterate the details which are most important. The aim should be, not merely to convey to the reader what John Smith says or does, but to make the reader *see* John Smith as he says and does these things.

Conversation

Most students find conversation very hard to write. For such students, and indeed for all of us, practice in pure dialogue is often beneficial. The aim should be, in the first exercises of this kind, not to convey any profound or significant facts of character or situation, but simply to attain naturalness and vitality in the choice of words and in the phrasing. As a means to this end, the literal transcription in the notebook of words, phrases, and scraps of conversa-

tion should be a part of the daily work of the serious student. Many times I have had a desire to introduce into a story the conversation of a specific character, or persons of a given racial or economic background, only to find that I had nothing to put into their mouths but the ideas I wanted them to convey — no specific words or idioms which I knew they could and would use. This lack is the bane of much "literary" conversation. Characters either talk in a stilted, bookish fashion, or they speak in some stereotyped argot or "dialect" drawn primarily from reading rather than from life.

The point of the matter is simply the reopening of the consideration with which this little book began: the fact that most of us live insulated, unresponsive lives, that most of our impressions of people and places are second-hand, derived from books rather than from direct observation.

The study of conversation opens several interesting problems which can be little more than suggested here. At the outset the student of conversation will be confronted by the necessity of deciding to what extent he will endeavor to reproduce, with phonetic literalness, the speech of his characters. He will realize, if he considers the matter, that very few if any of his characters speak consistent dictionary English — if, indeed, there is such a thing. As a matter of fact we all speak dialects — dialects of regional and local environment, dialects of racial inheritance, dialects of occupation and recreations. To

me, born and bred in southwestern Iowa, "hog" is pronounced "hawg," and "dog" "dawg." Is the writer to spell the words so when he reproduces my conversation? A friend of mine is a teacher of shorthand in Pittsburgh. She was so distressed by the unwillingness of her students to acknowledge the existence of the vowel sound which she found in "caught," "taught," and so forth, that she appealed to a teacher of English literature in the same high school: "*Won't* you come in and tell my students how to pronounce c-a-u-g-h-t? They won't believe me."

"Certainly," said the English teacher; and to the class — "c-a-u-g-h-t is pronounced *cot*."

The trouble was that my friend is from Kentucky, while the English teacher was a native Pittsburgher.

Again there are not only pronunciations, but words which are regional, and even purely local. In a small town in which I once taught, familiar and frequent use was made of a word which I have never encountered elsewhere and have sought in vain in dictionaries: "snivie," meaning a small object, tool, or appliance, as a wrench, a pencil, the cap of a fountain pen, etc.

For the student who becomes interested in this field there is one best book: *The American Language,* by H. L. Mencken — a most fascinating and stimulating work, and a study in contemporary philology of astonishing thoroughness and usefulness.

As the student examines the work of modern short story writers, he will find that the best practice seems

to lie in the direction of a refusal to attempt wholly literal reproduction of any person's diction; partly because it is impossible in the case of any save the most literate people, and partly because, if it were possible, the result would be so difficult to read as to destroy interest for all save the scientist. The better way is to suggest dialect by a few especially striking, vivid, and racy dialect words, using these consistently, and for the rest to keep to ordinary word forms and spellings — though characteristic idioms, or patterns and phrasings of words, should be sought. It is in the acquirement and retention of these all-important words and idioms that the notebook will be of service.

The commonest defect of the writing of conversation by beginners is the occurrence of long speeches. As a matter of fact, observation will show that comparatively few persons talk habitually in long or complicated sentences; nor, in ordinary conversation, are speeches of more than one sentence at all common. While it is not the writer's purpose to achieve phonographic literalness in conversation, it should be his aim to preserve the vitality and informality which result from comparatively brief and simple speeches.

The beginner should also be on his guard against the occurrence of solid blocks of conversation unbroken by description and action, and against monotony in indicating the speaker: "said Mr. Brown," "said Mrs. Brown," "replied Mr. Brown," "replied Mrs. Brown." When only two speakers are engaged in a conversation, the speaker needs to be indicated

only rarely. The student should make it a rule never to use " said Mrs. Brown " when it is not necessary to indicate the speaker, or when by some other means, as a bit of description or action, he can avoid the obvious phrase. The best way to master this detail is by study of the methods of good writers, and by experiment with isolated blocks of conversation mixed with description and action.

Attitude of Others

Characterization by showing the attitude of others may be either specific or general. In the first case, the writer reveals a person by telling what other persons say to him or about him, or think about him. Thus in a conversation between a father and a child, the father may be as much characterized by what the child says to him as by his own replies; or a conversation between the child and his mother may characterize the father during the latter's absence.

In the second case the writer states in expository fashion the attitude toward the character of his family, his friends, or his community. The author may write of a character in some such fashion as this: " Job Kern had few friends in the village; the old druggist with whom he discussed geology — the harness-maker with whom he played chess — no one else. Most people looked upon Job Kern as ' odd,' and perhaps malicious."

In either form, characterization by showing the attitude of others is often of immense importance in

revealing the emotional and spiritual background and environment of a character.

Place Description

Since place description is to be discussed fully in the next chapter under the title "setting," it will not be treated here beyond noting what is apparent to any observant person: that a doctor's office is in some measure an expression of his personality, as is a kitchen an expression of the housewife, or a farmyard the expression of the farmer. Hence place description often has large and definite usefulness in the revelation of character.

Action

Of all the methods of characterization, the most powerful is action. This is true whether we use the term in the generalized sense of habitual conduct, or confine it to the narrower meaning of what a person does at a given moment. The presentation of habitual or generalized action is usually of high value in the preliminary characterization of important persons in the story. By telling us how a farmer habitually cares for his stock, what a preacher habitually does in his forenoons, the writer prepares for the more specific presentation of character later on.

Specific action is capable of carrying a heavier emotional load than any other type of narration. This may be a consequence of the fact that Americans (at

least those I know) seldom express their more profound emotions in words. They are likely rather to look out the window, to whittle, or to pick up a newspaper. Later on, if at all, comes speech. At the crisis of a story, then, when the most intimate and final revelation of character is to be made, that writer is most successful who learns to place his chief dependence on action, rather than on conversation or introspection.

Introspection

Introspection, or the statement of what a character thinks and feels as a method of revealing that person, is one of the most important and interesting methods of characterization. It has been increasingly employed by the more important writers of recent years, until we have, finally, some stories which are devoid of any other method of presenting character: we have no description, no conversation, no action — merely a succession of mental states — thoughts, feelings, impulses — through which we come to know the person in question. As ordinarily employed, introspection enables the writer to supplement events by presenting the accompanying emotional and intellectual processes — for example, to parallel a speech with an explanation of what the speaker *really* thinks, or of what his hearer thinks or feels. Introspection is used also to present to the reader those memories, plans, aspirations, and general emotional experiences

of the characters which are not expressed or expressible in words or actions.

The introduction of this method involves the crossing of a boundary — from objective narration to subjective narration. To write objectively is to write of people wholly as objects observed, presenting only what is externally apparent — their appearance, their conversation, their gestures and actions, the things with which they have surrounded themselves — and thereby to enable the reader to know these people; inferring, as in real life, their feelings and motives from what is observed. This is the method of the dramatist, of course, who cannot tell us what his characters think except by their words and actions. But in subjective narration the character is less a person *acting* than a person *thinking*, and we know him primarily through the revelation of what is hidden from ordinary observation.

I must admit a fondness for the purely objective method. The emphasis laid by modern psychology upon the importance of impulses and experiences not expressed clearly, if at all, in objective ways, has probably made this method inadequate for the demands of the modern novel; but I believe that great things can be done in the field of the short story with purely objective methods. However this may be, it seems that most students will do best to hold pretty closely to the objective in their first attempts at story writing. Let the student learn to make his characters reveal themselves through appearance,

conversation, and action, with the help of place description, the attitude of others, and occasional exposition. Then let him add the insight into their mental processes which introspection permits. To some writers, of course, this advice is foolish; interested in how minds work, and why they work as they do, they cannot but choose the method which reflects their interest. And for certain characters and situations, also, the introspective method is necessary. But the beginner will do well to use it cautiously.

So far as the actual writing of introspection is concerned, the best suggestions may be gained by studying such writers as D. H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, and James Joyce. It will be noted that introspection may be rendered concrete as experience by the inclusion in it of vivid description of objects and events observed by the subject of the introspection. Unless so vitalized it should never appear in large blocks, but rather as parenthetical comments, glimpses of insight, in the midst of conversation and action.

Interpretation

Before leaving the subject of the presentation of character, it is necessary to refer to the practice of explaining to the reader what is implied in a character by a given detail, speech, or act. This is called interpretation. It amounts to the attachment of an explanatory tag to a detail which has been introduced,

and is at once an insult to the reader's intelligence and an inhibition to his attention. This is not to be confused with explanation of technical matters, as of the details of a process with which the reader cannot be assumed to be familiar. Such explanation is occasionally necessary, though in the short story such occasions of necessity should be avoided. The comment which calls the reader's attention to the fact that clear blue eyes suggest honesty, or that a certain speech reveals the broadmindedness of the speaker, should never be resorted to. If the detail is not strong enough to convey its own significance, it should be either strengthened or discarded. If it is strong enough, the interpretative comment is worse than superfluous.

In summing up I wish to say one thing more about this matter of characterization. I am fearful of laying too much stress upon methods and too little stress upon spirit. It seems to me that if a student can gain the attitude which results in thorough-going, sympathetic characterization, he has won the greatest victory in his effort for development in short story writing. If he has attained the spirit of dwelling upon all his characters, with genuine loving attention, seeking earnestly to know and understand; and if, working in this spirit, he does attain some genuine sense of character in the particular case and situation with which he is dealing, I have confidence that methods and means for putting down what he has to

say will not be hard to find. I think it is worth while to study methods, especially in the writings of others, and I think it is worth while to go through specific exercises in characterization by conversation, by action, and the like. On the other hand, entire dependence on method, as such, can never enable anyone to characterize successfully. Effective characterization will come only from knowing people, wanting to know people, and loving and studying people. In the last analysis the problem resolves itself into the question, "Are you willing and able to share the life of your character?"

CHAPTER VI

SETTING

What I have to say about *setting* as an element in short story writing had perhaps better be taken with a grain of salt; for I am aware of a personal predilection for stories which are rich in descriptive elements, particularly in place description. Perhaps, therefore, I am inclined to overemphasize the importance of these elements.

I am prepared to defend my preference, however, on several grounds. In the first place, I submit that, in the last analysis, there is only one theme for all serious fiction: the attempt of man to make the place on the planet that he desires for himself; and I submit, further, that in most presentations of this struggle the planet gets rather less than its share of attention. More seriously: human experience is always definitely related to physical environment, is actually influenced or determined by it. In transferring the experience, then, fullness of reality can be attained only by adequate inclusion of that physical environment.

In presenting the subject of setting to the student of the short story, I wish first to distinguish between what may be called spiritual or emotional setting, which is

supplied in reference to a given character by the characterization of others and the presentation of their attitude; and physical or material setting, which consists of description of nature and of rooms, houses, streets, fields, gardens, the whole objective background of experience. Setting of this first kind (which has been discussed briefly in the preceding chapter) is especially interesting to many modern writers. It plays a very large part in such books as *Main Street* and *West of the Water Tower*. Setting of the second kind is scarcely in so common favor. For it at its best, one must turn to Conrad and Hardy, or to Dreiser, Willa Cather, and Ruth Suckow.

This physical or objective background is necessary, however, to some extent, in every short story. The simplest and commonest necessity for it arises from the exigencies of situation and event. The reader must understand that there are doors right and left. He must understand that the action is taking place in a barn, a barroom, or a burying-ground. He has to know something about the physical facts of the case. Description in an elementary form, then, enters into every story.

More important is setting as a means of revealing character. We have already noted how an office, a kitchen, or a farmyard, may help us to know the person of whom it is an expression. Further use may be made of setting in relation to characterization by describing places which are not the expression of character, but rather the factors which have deter-

mined it: a description of a bleak, unlovely home may help us to understand the emotionally starved girl who comes from it. Description of a countryside will help us to understand anyone who lives there. Still further and more important, characterization is accomplished by describing a place or object and then revealing, through introspection, conversation, or action, the response of a person to it. This use of setting is very common and helpful.

Setting is often used in the endeavor to establish a given mood, either of a character in the narrative or on the part of the reader himself. Examples of such "mood descriptions" abound in the work of almost all great writers of fiction. The beginner should venture on them cautiously. If he is not careful he will have the skies weeping with every misfortune of his heroine, the birds carolling joyously whenever a confinement is terminated satisfactorily: the pathetic fallacy at its worst. In spite of the example of some very popular makers of fiction, this is not a judicious investment of place details. The beginner will do best to leave mood descriptions to a later date, and to use setting only for the purposes described above.

In the work of place description, it will be well to remember much of what has previously been said about description of persons. Details should not be massed, but so far as possible distributed through the action and conversation related to a given place. One must be sure, of course, to give the general and necessary outlines of a place at the outset, since in forming

an image of a setting the reader has no general concept, as in the case of the description of a person, to guide him. Diction is of supreme importance; and the young writer, as he walks along a street or across a field, as he enters a living room or restaurant or church, should note specific colors, shapes, textures, and seek the exact words to convey his impressions. Usually he will be astonished by the inadequacy of his vocabulary. Certainly, as long as one can see he will find new impressions which demand new searches for the right word. Vivid bits of place description, lists of suggestive adjectives, adverbs, and, especially, verbs — drawn both from observation and from reading — should form a part of every student's notebook. The verbs are most important. Let the student analyze an especially vigorous, vivid, and condensed place description, and he will find, in all probability, that verbs are responsible for most of its effectiveness. He should try to work out for himself the possibility of letting a single verb do the work of half a dozen other words.

Another matter which deserves the special attention of the student is the part played by other senses than that of sight in our impressions of places. If you analyze your experience of a given place you will probably find that the sense of hearing makes an important contribution, and that smell and even taste enter to some extent. Less obvious but sometimes very important are the kinetic or muscular sensations — of the shapes, masses, weights of buildings, hills,

or trees; and tactual sensations of temperature, moisture, surfaces, and textures. The part played by appeals to these other senses in effective place description will be apparent as the student analyzes the more vivid descriptions which he encounters in his reading. A suggestion of the smell of growing corn on a still July night will take a native of the corn belt in imagination to the edge of the field much more surely than any appeal to the sense of sight or hearing, important though these are. The experience of walking through a tunnel could by no means be adequately conveyed by visual details alone. The difficulty of finding words for these elements in the experience of a place is matched by the effectiveness of the details when the right words are found. The beginner will find his world growing, and his language with it, as he toils to put into his notebook the reality of day-by-day experience.

Sometimes, to be sure, setting rises above the place previously assigned it, to become an important, even a dominating, force in the story. The familiar and supreme example of this is *The Return of the Native,* in which the Heath not merely affords background, but determines conduct and destiny — is, in short, the chief character of the novel. Another profoundly interesting example is Conrad's " Heart of Darkness", in which the jungle — seldom extensively described, the impression of it conveyed rather by hint, by inference, and by occasional vivid glimpses — is nevertheless the overpowering and determining force of the tale.

To the student who is skeptical as to the importance of knowing the setting of which one undertakes to write, I recommend a comparison of "Heart of Darkness" with Katherine Fullerton Gerould's "Vain Oblations." Mrs. Gerould's vastly over-rated story has as its theme an idea as dramatic in its possibilities as that of "Heart of Darkness" (though I deny the essential truth of this theme). The failure of "Vain Oblations" to carry conviction is due almost entirely to its destitution of effective treatment of setting. Mrs. Gerould does not know what she is describing. But in "Heart of Darkness" there is never a moment's doubt that Conrad knows his setting and is master of its significance as a decisive force in human destiny.

For a use of setting in this way, the writer must have a very active sense of place as such, and a conviction of its importance in human affairs. To write such a story artificially, without a mastering sense of the thing which it attempts to convey, would be futile and absurd. But the writer who loves the forms and colors of earth and sky and sea, or the loom and thrust of buildings, the stretch of lighted pavements, the warmths and textures and surfaces of offices and cafés and of the rooms of dwellings, will do well to give his utmost effort to the presentation of these things, confident that whatever he has seen freshly and truly is significant and worthy of attentive portrayal.

CHAPTER VII

STYLE

What I have to say about style is perhaps of slight moment, and certainly will meet with but limited acceptance. I remember a friendly argument in which I once engaged with a young woman whom I believe to be one of the foremost short story writers of America, in which she maintained with spirit that style as a thing in itself, and in any sense capable of consideration apart from content, does not now exist in American fiction, if indeed it has ever existed at all. I was not and am not unacquainted with the critical authorities for this view; yet I held and still hold that there is such a thing as style in itself, and that it is one of the legitimate concerns of the writer of short stories.

To me, style is simply the auditory or sensory element in prose. Subtract from a given passage the ideas which it transfers, the information it contains, and what you have left is the impression on the senses of the words and their arrangement — a matter of vowel and consonant sounds and of the rhythm of syllables, with the inevitable emotional concomitants of these sounds and rhythms. In this sense, one listening to the intelligent reading aloud of a totally

unknown language will receive the impressions which go to make up style. Style is the music of prose.

The decay of style in our day, its almost total absence from the work of some of our most significant writers, is due in part to the discontinuance of the practice of reading aloud. The student of style must read aloud, and listen to others read, both good and bad prose. I can conceive of no more fitting atonement for Sinclair Lewis than to be compelled to listen to the reading aloud of the whole of *Main Street*.

Of the elements of style suggested above, rhythm is the simpler, though sufficiently complicated. The rhythm of prose is in part a matter of sentence units, and in part a matter of units within the sentence. The effect of long, sonorous, carefully modulated sentences, of brisk, rapid, or explosive sentences, and of very short sentences, will be familiar to any reader possessed of a fair sense of rhythm. Perhaps most obvious is the connection of short sentences with crises of action or emotion. But rhythm within the sentence is not quite so readily analyzed. Examine carefully the following sentence: "The crowd swept together like leaves of the aspen blown by the four winds into one heap." [1] Read these words over and over aloud, and you will perceive that they fall naturally and indeed inevitably into four groups, which we may call phrasal units, ending with "together," "aspen," "winds," and "heap." Further, each of those units

[1] From George Carver's *The Scarlet One*, in *Stories from The Midland*. (See Appendix VII.)

will be seen to contain stressed and unstressed syllables: and, for most readers, the arrangement of these syllables in the four units will suggest a pattern. Perhaps this exercise will be sufficient to introduce the student to a field of investigation of the utmost interest and significance, as yet far from fully explored — that of prose rhythm. Study of the relation of the length, regularity, and structure of the phrasal units to the emotional content of the sentence, in the work of such writers as D. H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, Joseph Hergesheimer, and James Branch Cabell, will reveal much to the attentive reader.

The sounds of the individual syllables, compounded of the vowels and consonants of which they are composed, are equally important. Even the casual reader will agree that certain sounds have specific emotional suggestion, as, for example, the " s " sound, the short " i " sound of " pin " and " itch," and the long golden " o " sound. Hence it is fair to infer that every vowel or consonantal sound has an emotional value, usually so faint as to be incapable of isolation, but often apparent enough when the sound is reiterated and combined with others of like or contrasting value.

The point to be noted is that prose, in this aspect, is simply a different handling of the materials of metrical poetry — with larger and freer patterns both in rhythm and in word-sound. The intermediate forms of Whitman and Sandburg are significant in this connection.

And what has all this to do with the study of short

story writing? Just this: that style — the arrangement and sound of words — plays a tremendous part in the effective transference of experience. There are associations between rhythm and syllabic quality on the one hand, and emotion on the other, which reach far back into the roots of racial experience — to the common beginnings of human language and human nature. Our responses to rhythms and sounds are determined by remote and enormous totals of experience. Our consciousness of some of these responses indicates that there are countless other responses of which we are not aware, but which nevertheless enter into our emotional reactions to poetry and prose. The attempt to analyze or formulate the effect of rhythm and sound completely is idle; but this does not prevent the trained and sensitive writer from using these elements of style freely and spontaneously, and depending upon them to secure emotional response in his reader. If any one doubts that rhythm and word sounds have emotional value, let him break up the rhythms of one of the passages quoted in Appendix VII, substitute for the important words others of different sound but approximately equivalent meaning — and contemplate the result.

Excellence in style, in short story writing, is almost entirely a matter of emotional harmony of rhythm and word sound with meaning. The objective is adaptation of the sound element in the medium to the intellectual and emotional elements. The best narrative style is by no means that which is the most mel-

lifluous or beautiful intrinsically, but that which is the most perfect as an auditory medium for the given emotional experience.

Let us admit freely that self-conscious efforts at style are likely to be disastrous. What the writer should hope to do is to possess himself so fully of the sensory resources of his medium — make himself so keenly responsive to flow and color of words — that when he comes to write that which he feels deeply and truly he will achieve style without conscious effort. Revision in the interest of style should, I believe, usually be confined to reading aloud in the effort to exclude rough and inharmonious passages — recognizing, of course, that roughness in sound and rhythm may be of fundamental necessity for some material. Artificialty and preciosity are as odious to me as to any one. I never advise a student to take a bad story and "doctor up its style." But I believe that the student who can learn to love words, the ebb and stress of their patterns and the minute beauties of their sounds, is likely in the end to tell his story better for this love, and is certain in the meantime to find not a little of the craftsman's pleasure, both in his reading and his own work.

Here, then, is the substance of my doctrine of style for the student of the short story: memorize the passages in Appendix VII; study their phrasal structure, the vowel and consonant values of the words; seek other passages like these. And then remember that a whole story cannot be written in such a perfected

style — that we must have degree and contrast as in other matters — and study the style of other portions of the stories from which these bits are taken. Finally, in your own writing forget in the hour of composition that there is such a thing as style. But never forget that words are alive and plastic, and that if you care enough for them they will make you master of strange and memorable beauties.

CHAPTER VIII

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

Getting a story started often seems insuperably difficult. How shall I begin? what shall I put down first? how shall I cover the first sheet of paper? — these questions are likely to be puzzling. To the student who has never been conscious of such a difficulty I have nothing to say except that he is fortunate. He is hereby excused from reading the rest of the chapter. But to the fellow who agrees that the first page is the hardest — and he is by no means necessarily inferior in any way to the other — the rather mechanical analysis which follows may possibly be of interest.

There are comparatively few ways of beginning a short story: by action, by conversation, by place or personal description, by introspection, by presentation of general emotional environment, by exposition of character, by the enunciation of theme (of the abstract or general notion which the story is to illustrate), by the presentation of circumstances under which the story is told.

Of these methods, one widely favored today is action. Mr. Fagin, in the book already mentioned, is authority for the statement that one editor calls the

following sentence an ideal beginning: "He went up to the attic and hung himself." Stories must have "punch" in the first page, in the first line. They must arrest the reader's attention. They must "get across."

This is undeniably true if one is writing a story to sell to such editors as the one quoted above. It is not necessarily true if one is writing the story because he has something to say — because some phase of human experience has so engaged his attention as to impel him powerfully to its expression. Hence comparatively few of the great short stories of the world begin with action, at least with action of any highly exciting kind. The only safe rule for the student is this: begin the story with action if that is the natural, inevitable way to begin it; but do not begin with action for any other reason. A story which has so little intrinsic interest as to necessitate the adoption of an artificial device to insure its being read had better not be written at all.

All that has been said about action applies equally to conversation, which is often its equivalent in the modern story.

Place and personal description are among the best ways of beginning stories. Such descriptions should be brief, vivid, and related to the principal characters or scenes of the story. It is nearly always a mistake to begin with a description of a minor character.

Often a generalized description of the background of a story, or a similarly generalized exposition of

character, is a good way of beginning. The student of Chehov will find most of his stories beginning in one of these ways.

Introspection, if used to begin a story, must have a considerable descriptive content, since through the thought of a character we must at once begin to know the facts about him and the background of his life.

The statement of the theme of a story at the outset is an old method, but it is seldom, for the modern writer, a good one. It has the advantage of linking up the narrative with general experience, and hence presumably with the individual experience of the reader. For this reason it is used by many modern writers as a device to secure favorable attention. Such use is not justified unless the theme is so obscure and complex as to require definition, or unless the story itself is so exceptional in its material as to require some such special linking of the narrative with what the reader himself may have observed.

The method of beginning a story by explaining the circumstances under which it is told is of course confined to first person narratives, and is exemplified in many of the stories of Kipling and Conrad. This explanation may take the form of the establishment of a narrative frame — of description, conversation, and action — for the story proper, as in Kipling's "My Lord the Elephant" (and most of the Mulvaney stories); or it may constitute an explanation of the teller's relation to the events to be narrated and the characters to be presented, as in the same author's

"The Finest Story in the World." One or the other of these methods of beginning is usually advantageous, if not actually necessary, in a first person narrative.

The student will find his most helpful exercise in this connection to be a study of the beginnings of short stories which he approves — especially of a large number of stories by one writer, as Chehov or Katherine Mansfield. He will note the occurrence of the several methods discussed above, with their combinations and modifications, and will soon be able to determine with reasonable assurance what will be the best beginning for a given story.

So far as methods of ending a story are concerned, perhaps the less said the better. If the right ending does not grow inevitably out of the writer's conception of the story itself, there is likely to be something so seriously wrong in the conception or presentation of character, or in the planning of events, that no patter about methods could be helpful. Most good stories dictate their own endings, not only in general outline of events but also in details. Sometimes, however, though very rarely, stories of the highest intrinsic merit seem to offer the possibility of two or more endings. Possibly a few comments and suggestions will help an occasional student.

In the first place, strange as it may seem to the conscientious young writer, a sad ending is not always necessary. Most of us are prone in our first honest attempts at writing to interpret experience in terms

of tragedy. But nevertheless it is true that a happy ending is not necessarily a bad ending. I assert this even though I am far from upholding the "God's in his heaven — all's right with the world" philosophy of life, and though I regard writers who do consistently uphold that philosophy, day in and day out, as either quacks or fools. There is tragedy in the world, unrelieved, savage, victorious. Also there is happiness the more precious that it is insecure, and faith that is not without reward.

The only ending that is indefensible is an ending that is consciously modified for the pleasure of a prospective reader.

As to the technique of "getting out from under" the story, I have but one suggestion: action. Most short stories should end sharply, poignantly. To carry the fullest emotional load, action alone is adequate. If you have ended a story with a speech or a description and it somehow seems not quite right, try to substitute for it an action which sums up and expresses the situation.

The general purport of this little chapter is clear enough without summary. I have tried to indicate the necessity of fidelity to what seems to the writer the essential truth of his material, and the importance of careful study of the methods actually employed by the masters.

CODA

"And where do we go from here?" Not, I hope it is apparent, to the typewriter, for the inditing of masterpieces, or indeed of anything else. If any one undertook the reading of this book under the impression that it would teach him to write short stories, he is undoubtedly by this time convinced of a bad bargain. Possibly it will have helped some readers to see short story material, may even have given concrete suggestions which will aid students in learning for themselves how to write. It could scarcely hope to do more.

To the street, then, the store, the field, the subway; to construction camps and foundries; to homes and street-cars and court-rooms: to all the places where people live and work. Attentive and sympathetic observation of others and of oneself; dispassionate analysis of impulse and motive; painstaking accumulation of detail and mastery of its presentation; projection of oneself into the hopes and fears, miseries and exaltations, of all manner of men: these are the requirements of the writer. Without these, rules and formulæ are barren; "structure" and "plot" and all the rest are ineffectual talismans. With these, few and simple means to effective telling of a story are enough.

I return, as you see, to my first proposition. If you want to write short stories primarily for money or "fame" or God knows what else, I wish you joy of it, civilly but not too earnestly. But if you want to write because people and places are alive to you, because you have experience that demands expression, I promise that you will not be disappointed in the compensation which awaits your utmost effort. You may not immediately "make" the *Cosmopolitan* or the *Red Book,* or even the *Atlantic Monthly;* they will not be lacking who will tell you that I am doing all I can to keep you from it, and they may be right. But you will have a good time. You will discover that the world is a surprisingly interesting place and that there are in it a multitude of new things.

It is perhaps unfortunate that our lives are not supremely important to any save ourselves; that by no stretch of imagination can we reasonably regard ourselves as capable of modifying in the least appreciable degree the enormous inertia of the race; and that our taking off is in the last analysis an insupportable calamity to no survivor. But it is the converse of this truth that to us our lives, compound of swift days, are very precious. And art affords the only means yet ascertained whereby we may appreciably and certainly increase the richness of those days.

APPENDIX I

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This list of books is primarily an expression of personal interests and preferences. It is intended as suggestive rather than exhaustive. I have, however, tried to indicate what I believe to be the best editions of the more important short story writers.

Historical

Canby, Henry Seidel, *The Short Story in English* (Holt).

O'Brien, Edward J., *The Advance of the American Short Story* (Dodd, Mead).

Pattee, Fred Lewis, *The Development of the American Short Story* (Harper).

Anthologies

Best Short Stories of 1915, etc., edited by Edward J. O'Brien (Small, Maynard).

Best Russian Short Stories, edited by Thomas Seltzer (Boni & Liveright, Modern Library).

Georgian Stories (Putnam).

The Great Modern American Stories, edited by William Dean Howells (Boni & Liveright).

The Great Modern English Stories, edited by Edward J. O'Brien (Boni & Liveright).

The Great Modern French Stories, edited by Willard Huntington Wright (Boni & Liveright).

Individual Writers

(For other books by each writer, see list of the publisher mentioned.)

Sherwood Anderson, *The Triumph of the Egg* (Huebsch).

Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (Boni & Liveright, Modern Library).

Honore Balzac, *The Atheist's Mass* (Macmillan).

Ambrose Bierce, *In the Midst of Life* (Boni & Liveright).

Ivan Bunin, *The Dreams of Chang* (Knopf).

Willa Cather, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (Knopf).

Chehov, *The Darling and Other Stories,* translated by Constance Garnett (Macmillan).

Joseph Conrad, *Youth and Other Stories* (Doubleday, Page).

Stephen Crane, *Men, Women and Boats* (Boni & Liveright, Modern Library).

Theodore Dreiser, *Free and Other Stories* (Boni & Liveright, Modern Library).

John Galsworthy, *Captures* (Scribner).

Hamlin Garland, *Main Travelled Roads* (Harper).

Maxim Gorky, *Chelkash* (Knopf, Pocket Library).

Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Tales* (Harper).

O. Henry, *Whirligigs* (Doubleday, Page).

Sarah Orne Jewett, *Tales of New England* (Houghton, Mifflin).

Rudyard Kipling, *The Day's Work* (Doubleday, Page).

Jack London, *The Children of the Frost* (Macmillan).

Guy de Maupassant, *Yvette* (Knopf).

Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party* (Knopf).

Turgenev, *The Two Friends, etc.,* translated by Constance Garnett (Macmillan).

Mark Twain, *The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg* (Harper).

Thyra Samter Winslow, *Picture Frames* (Knopf).

APPENDIX II

This appendix consists of a literal transcription of portions of the notebooks of some of my students, representing each of the several kinds of material suggested in Chapter II. Three of the place descriptions are from other sources.

People

They were extremely tall — both of them — and looked like a couple of crooked telephone poles when they danced.

. . . . . .

He had a wide, sudden grin, like the opening of a red cavern.

. . . . . .

There the twins lay, sound asleep in their little white slips, their arms and feet bare, and their hair curling in tiny dark ringlets on their foreheads and necks.

. . . . . .

A small woman, straight as an arrow, marched down the sidewalk in a faded, tight-fitting blue suit. A small black hat, set far back on her head, seemed to pull her head backward by the weight of a long, rusty black plume, twisted in the wind.

. . . . . .

Two young men in a Ford truck, just about to start from in front of a small white house. A heavy, white-moustached man in shirt sleeves swears vigorously, stumping back and forth. As the truck roars and rattles away he

shouts, "You needn't show your face around here again if you go! "

. . . . . .

Overheard: " she told me that at first she couldn't get along without him, but now she thinks she can."

. . . . . .

A morose, lanky, middle-aged man, wearing a winter cap with the ear-muffs down, leans over the back fence in the April sunshine and watches his spry spinster neighbor make garden. " You know that man Louise married," he says, " that McMaster fellow? Well, they found him dead in bed this morning."

The neighbor straightens up suddenly. " You don't say! Well — he died about as he lived, I guess." She goes on planting radish seed in a neat, straight drill.

Places

Two blocks east on the flats, past a fertilized lawn, wet, pungent, musty with the afternoon's rain; past a vacant lot where crooked rows of late cabbage lean in their bedraggled flounces.

. . . . . .

A puff of wind shook the clematis vine at the corner of the low gray house, scattering the purple petals in a slow, fluttering shower.

. . . . . .

The black, angular tower of the gas reservoir framed in its network bits of velvety night sky, with a few dim stars.

. . . . . .

The hollow was full of cool green shadows, dark under the trees and bushes, and scattered in softened splotches on the yellow road.

From a little bridge whose rail glistened in the moonlight, a long whitish road stretched straight north between level meadows. Near at hand a line of poplars, rustling and gleaming as they turned their leaves in the faint wind, covered the road with their vague shadow; but at length the trees ceased, and the pale line of the road lay open to the sky. For a long way between the fields the road ran, narrowing and brightening as it receded, until at the horizon it notched the skyline just below the full north star.

. . . . . .

I sat at my window looking out into the rainy night. Across the street the arc light jerked and chuckled, putting fidgety shadows up to the wet elm boughs. Outside the flickering circle of light, tree-tops wavered dimly; beyond them was darkness; not a star to break the obscurity; not a sound beside the rain patting down on the leaves in its endless monotone. Suddenly a jagged streak leaped across the sky, showing leaden cloud-masses twisting upon themselves; then — darkness.

. . . . . .

The rising night wind stirs the reeds along the marsh and wrinkles the dark pools where clouds holding the last streak of daylight in the sky are reflected faintly. The edge of the marsh melts into shadow. The rustling of the swamp-grass is the only sound. Suddenly out of the shadow comes the whirr of wings, and a wild duck rises. Black against the faint sky, steady, unswerving, he cuts the growing dusk, pushing back the nearing sky line until he is swallowed by the darkness.

Names For Stories

Airy Nothings
It's All One
Exert Yourself, Peter
The Beauty
Roots of Things
For the Pianoforte
A Day at Lucerne
The Heathen

Names For Characters

Mr. Rooney
Mel Adams
Francis Kirkway
Al Gentle
George Stubb
Neal Adamson
Peel Cassidy
Calla Burney
Fay Strong
Enid Ashton
Grace Dowling
Miss Pettit
Carma Dusey
Fern McElroy

Bits of Phrasing from Projected Stories

The last night of her buoyant, perplexed girlhood the cold disc of the moon watched. She took a run, then a leap along the deserted path, the dead leaves scurrying along behind her.

. . . . . .

Immemorial games of "wink-um" in decorous front parlors.

. . . . . .

The minister droned: "For matrimony is an holy estate, instituted by God in the days of man's innocency."

The mother sat motionless; her parted hair, just showing gray, was smooth, her dark eyes luminous. In sunlight from the window her jet beads flashed and darkened.

Green. . . . The painting of the house ten years before had meant his defiance of convention in a town where all houses that are not of brick or stone are white, or a modest gray, or more commonly, aged and paintless.

. . . . . .

They would always be alone in the big arid house, eating three meals a day in silence.

. . . . . .

Ideas for Stories: Themes and Plans

A man working for his master's degree in psychology sends out a lot of questions to be answered by persons who are "the only child." Through the story of one girl, he becomes very much interested in her.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Biddle, a severe and energetic Friend, has a lonely old neighbor who is her uninvited guest beside her fire every evening. This friend, Mrs. Clark, has changed greatly since their girlhood, and is now dirty and eccentric, though she is intelligent. Mrs. Biddle disapproves of her and pays little attention to her as they sit in Mrs. Biddle's home each evening. At last some incident makes Mrs. Biddle tell Mrs. Clark that she can stand her no longer, and that she must not come again until she can appear decently and cleanly dressed. Mrs. Clark does not return for three evenings, and Mrs. Biddle becomes uneasy and then remorseful. After a struggle with herself she goes to see the woman, and finds her ill. Mrs. Biddle tries to be brusque and to conceal the anxiety she has felt, but Mrs. Clark understands her, and is both triumphant and grateful. There is a moment of understanding.

Why does an old, deserted building, with broken windows, torn paper, hingeless doors, and sagging roof, always suggest mystery? Is a new house never haunted? Story of a new house that has its ghost before ever it has been lived in.

. . . . . .

A woman of forty is just entering the university. She is attending classes with young people in their early twenties. Will she be able to make the adjustment necessary to social intercourse or will she be simply a solitary figure moving through university activities alone? Is complete understanding ever possible between two generations for a long period of time, or is it only in flashing moments of sympathy that the two understand each other?

. . . . . .

It is a psychological fact that we become like those things we habitually do. An interesting character study might be developed along this line by taking an individual and placing him in a totally different environment and following his reactions over a period of time. What would happen to a college girl dropped into an atmosphere of total disregard for anything above eating, drinking and sleeping? If kept within such narrow limits by financial or geographical limitations would she come to the same attitude, or is anything once learned ever completely forgotten? Is a final capitulation always inevitable?

. . . . . .

There are twins on the campus, almost replicas of each other. They look, act, and are alike, except that one seems to be a fainter, more washed out personality than the other. Could it be that one twin's personality is simply the

shadow of the more vigorous personality? or does environment make them so similar? Work out this idea in a "twin" story.

. . . . . .

There is no sudden change. Changes come gradually — so gradually that we do not realize they are taking place. The people about us grow older; the things we know flourish and pass away; change works insidiously. At the end of a period of years we find that we have not accomplished what we want — the years have gone by us. Story of a man who comes to late life realizing that he has not done any of the things that he has planned to do. He tries to show this fact to his son and to help him to avoid the same mistake — but late in life, the son, too, realizes that he has failed to do the things he has planned, and determines to help his children to do better.

. . . . . .

Did it ever occur to you that you have never seen the other side of the moon? There are so many things whose other sides we have never seen. Perhaps the other sides that we know nothing about are totally different. The other side of the cranky old man we know, the fruit seller at the corner store, the tired librarian, the cross old janitor, the flip little girl, — they must all have other sides which are full of story material.

APPENDIX III

ILLUSTRATION OF "THEME" AND "PLAN"

Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party": (in the volume, *The Garden Party and Other Stories,* Knopf, 1922, $2.00).

Theme: The first imperfect but genuine realization of poverty and death by a sheltered, sensitive girl.

Synopsis

At Laura's home preparations for the garden party are all-absorbing. She supervises the workmen in their decision as to where to put up the marquee, and is amazed by the fact that one of them cares for the smell of lavender. There follow the moving of furniture, the arrival of flowers and favors, conferences with mother, brother and sister as to costume and other details. Into this comes, by the servants, news of the accidental death of a workman who lives in a row of poor houses near Laura's home. She is much disturbed, and thinks the party should be postponed, but her sister and mother make light of her attitude. The party is a great success. After it is over Laura's mother decides to send some of the surplus food to the family of the dead man. Laura takes it, and finds the cottage — ashamed of her errand and her appearance. She is taken to see the dead man, and finds him strangely beautiful. Starting home she meets her brother, who is able to understand her fragmentary expression of her response to the whole experience.

SCENARIO

I. THE GARDEN.

(Place descriptions emphasized)

1. Laura's mother tells her to supervise the placing of the marquee.
2. The men choose a place for it.
3. Laura is surprised by the action of one of them, who breaks and sniffs a sprig of lavender. She regrets class distinctions.

II. THE HOUSE.

1. Laura is called to the telephone. She greets her brother warmly, as he is leaving for the office.
2. Furniture is being rearranged.
3. Flowers arrive.
4. Laura's sister tries the piano.
5. Details of food — arrival of men with refreshments which have been ordered.

III. THE HOUSE — 2.

1. News of the death of a workman neighbor (from man who brought refreshments). The man has a wife and five children.
2. Laura appeals to her sister to stop the party. The sister is wholly unsympathetic.
3. Laura appeals to her mother. She is at first amused, then vexed.
4. Laura is perplexed. She intends to appeal to her brother, but he praises her appearance, and she does not.

IV. THE GARDEN.

1. Bits of action and conversation.

2. As they talk after the party is over, Laura's father tells of the accident.
3. Laura's mother decides to send food to the family of the dead man. Laura is uncertain, but takes the food.

V. The Road and Lane.

(Place descriptions emphasized)

Laura is embarrassed by her errand and appearance.

VI. The Workman's Home.

1. She inquires if this is the place.
2. She determines not to stop.
3. She is ushered in in spite of herself.
4. The widow does not comprehend. Her sister thanks Laura.
5. The sister takes Laura into the bedroom and uncovers the dead man's face. It is beautiful and happy, but Laura is profoundly stirred. All she can say is " Forgive my hat."

VII. The Lane.

1. Her brother is waiting for her.
2. He understands her attempt to say what she feels.

APPENDIX IV

Point of View

Let us assume that the student has decided to write a story based upon the theme suggested in Chapter III, the reluctance of the older generation to give place to the new. His story concerns, let us say, a retired farmer and his wife who appeal to an old lawyer in the village, a lifelong friend, for advice in their difficulties. Their son and his wife are conducting the farm (still the property of the old people) in a way to which they object. This story might be told in the first person by one of the major characters — the mother, let us say:

"Jethro came home from the farm today clean mad. . . . We went right over to Judge Horton's."

Or the events might be told in the first person by the Judge: "Many a time I've seen the same kind of trouble that Jethro Brandon and his son had over their farm."

Or the story might be told by some colleague of the Judge's, as told to him by the Judge.

Again (to note the third person possibilities): we may present the events as they are perceived by one of the major characters, using the third person instead of the first: "To Jethro Brandon, crouched unseeing against the side of the buggy seat, there was no beauty in the clean rows of knee-high corn sweeping across the eighty in long lines from the road to the very edge of the feedlots."

Or we may adopt the point of view of a minor character, using the third person still: "Judge Horton heard the shuffling, reluctant feet on the worn stairs."

Finally, we may write impersonally: "There was an element of the tragic in the appearance of Jethro Brandon and his wife as they paused for a moment, listening, before the woman knocked on the scarred door of 'H. Horton, Lawyer.'"

APPENDIX V

Characterization

All of the examples in this and the following appendix are taken from *Stories from The Midland* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1924, $2.50). They are intended merely as suggestive illustrations and are by no means inclusive of all the principles discussed in Chapter V.

Personal Description

An old man was just coming out of the barn along the two planks to the back door. He was big but crippled with rheumatism. He wore a blue shirt, a vest with a brown sateen back, and gray woolen socks. He had a handsome old face that must have been romantic in its youth, with a wave of snow-white hair, a high color, a big white mustache and small brown eyes. He regarded the stranger with the wariness of a country man. It was Luke Hockaday.

—From A Rural Community," by Ruth Suckow.

Lily would dig a little hole with the point of her fine silk parasol, and droop her head under its flower-wreathed brim. She was so fair and fresh of color that the freckles stood out across her nose in a little spattered pattern. Her cheeks were downy like fruit, and their color and contour were like a sort of ineffable fruit. Her fair hair

was straight, but it was so thick and fine as to roll up from her face in a sort of silver crest; and her long gray eyes, clear and cool under straight, fair brows, lent oddly enough, a contrasting note for all their grayness. It took Lily's gray eyes to subdue the fruity curve and color of her face.

— From "Doc Greer's Practice," by Agnes Mary Brownell.

After the endless roar and clatter of the train, the noise made by the open stage was a mere whisper, a sound all but lost in the silence of that great desert upland. Young George Freeman tilted his straw hat against the glare, built up his suitcase and salesman's sample-bag into a more comfortable support, and began to whistle tunelessly and briskly.

Dipping and rising, dipping and rising, the whole land swept down toward a low mountain range, far-reaching and vague as the coast-line of an unknown continent. The unconcerned eyes beneath the hat-brim glanced at it as they might have glanced at haystacks through the windows of a flying train. The grave presence of the wilderness was nothing to George Freeman. It was all part of "the road," — the road, which declared itself in the smartness of his checked suit, in the rather self-conscious shrewdness of his face, in the very tilt of his straw hat. The pucker of the whistling was the last salvage of boyhood about him, and the pucker alone was likable.

— From "In the Uplands," by Walter L. Myers.

Conversation

She rose and advanced resolutely to the ironing-board. "Now here, Miz Murray, you give me that there iron. You

don't reckon I'm goin' to set here an' see you do my work? "

Again she was forced into the chair. " You leave me be. I come over here to iron, and iron I'm goin' to! You say Mister Embree got the call to preach an' lef' you the plantin' to do? "

" Why, yes, Miz Murray. What else could he do? He got the call. It come clear as a bell one day when he was in the middle of a furrer, an' he dropped the lines right there and lef' the team stand, an' he come runnin' to the house an' he sez to me: ' Mollie! ' sez he, ' Hallelujah! The Lord has called me! ' An' we both fell right down on our knees an' thanked the Lord. An' when we got up he says: ' Git my satchel, Mollie, an' pack it quick. I must be up an' away on the Lord's business.' — An' from that time on till he died he was gone from home most all the time."

Mrs. Murray walked to the stove, standing with her back to Mrs. Embree, and her wet forefinger hissed against a hot iron. Perhaps her action had the purpose of hiding the expression on her face, but all she said was: " Well, I just dare Jim Murray to git the call. If he did he'd wisht mighty soon he'd been deef — even if we ain't got nary chick or child! " — and the thump with which she resumed operations on the stiff bosom of Deacon Oliver's white shirt emphasized her threat.

The widow seemed not to have heard. Her shining eyes were fixed on space as though she were reliving the spiritual exaltation of bygone days. " The Lord spoke to Andrew direct," she said, " an' he heard him an' obeyed. He was one of the powerfullest preachers this country ever seen — they'll all tell you that, Miz Murray. Oh! If I could only be sure that Tom — "

"An' you an' the little childern" — interrupted Mrs. Murray, "how'd you manage to run the farm?"

The light vanished, leaving an old and weary face. "We done it," she answered grimly. "The girls was too small to hep much right at first an' it was pretty near more'n I could heft alone, so Andrew he made a practice to be home a day or two each week to sorter straighten things out. At cotton pickin' time he was there a right smart."

"That was kind of him," said Mrs. Murray with wasted irony.

"An' the neighbors was good — so good! There was Miz Donaldson, a mile away. I'll never forget her — never. If it hadn't been for her, I don't believe I'd a been alive today. It always seemed like when I couldn't go no further she'd happen in to hep me. The Lord sent her, I reckon. You remind me a lot of her, Miz Murray."

"Well, the Lord never sent me," said Mrs. Murray with a positive thump of the iron. "I come myself!"

— From "Wasted," by Mary Arbuckle.

Action

John Lake laid his hand across his eyes. There was silence in the room, in the house, and in all the town. George Freeman knew that the silence was his. He spoke clearly and quietly; the words came without effort; they could not be kept back:

"I guess I can tell you now that Joe is here. He's been coming closer and closer this last half hour. He is here by the door. He is coming in now to go home with you."

For a long, chilling instant the silence held.

Then the door swung back. Joe Lake strode in and knelt beside the bed. "Yes," he said, and hid his face.

— From "In the Uplands," by Walter L. Myers.

Attitude of Others

"Funny thing," commented the teamster one evening. "We used to think you wasn't human exactly." He laughed heartily. "Gotta get acquainted with a guy, ain't you?"

Then his wife, a thin, washed-out little woman, embarrassed the little clerk greatly by saying gravely,

"Mr. Neal, you're a good man."

Her eyes were on the little cripple.

— From "The Man with the Good Face," by Frank Luther Mott.

Place Description

He came to the very edge of town, almost to the woods through which Honey Creek ran. A house stood at the turn of the road. Of all things he had seen it was the most autumnal. It stood plain and white against the depths of blue sky. Its trees were turning to pale yellow, its yard scattered with dry leaves. On the back porch yellow seed corn hung by the bleached husks to dry. Hickory nuts and walnuts were spread out on a piece of rag carpet. On the fence posts, orange pumpkins were set in blue granite kettles to ripen. The corn in the small field was in the shock. The smell of apples came from somewhere.

— From "A Rural Community," by Ruth Suckow.

Introspection

Molly left the stage and walked up the aisle. At the back of the house she dropped into a seat and sat watching Duval, who was undoing a cloth roll. Bits of metal caught the light from the upper window and sent it brokenly like cries into the hushed light of the empty house. She sank lower and lower in the seat until her knees pressed against the seat in front of her painfully. Yet she did not move, remaining passive and nerveless. Soon, in a few hours, under the white blaze of the stage she would be alert and brisk in her spangled dress. Sometime in the course of the hours, or minutes, an unforeseen impulse would touch her to action; she would step into her usual gestures, all would be as before. But for the moment a huge lassitude was upon her, from which there smokily rose, flickering and brightening, the sight of Charley behind the counter, with a grimace munching his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Down the room, dressed in white, she was making carbonate hiss into a soda. Men talked loudly, and the familiar muted metallic clatter of silverware on china beat through her senses as a sea; and as a sea its sound sank to unnoticed levels, for the door of the restaurant had slammed shut behind her, and she stood looking down the avenue, where street cars shrieked on the turn at the corner and jarred across tracks. Charley had gone, the restaurant had been sold; and another woman, fat and pig-eyed, had watched her put on her hat and leave. For the last time the door had closed on that ceaseless clatter. . . . In the agent's gaudy room she sat hopeless. The short smooth man didn't want her, she hadn't had experience enough, only a few weeks

in a chorus; and she had two dollars left. Yet in the dim light on the stage the short smooth man was pushing the trunk into the far left corner. So he had taken her, months before — and to-night, as usual, he would throw knives at her, knives bright as silver.

— From "Glare of Circumstance," by R. L. Sergel.

APPENDIX VI

Setting

The prairie lay dreaming in the warmth of early summer. Level, monotonous, it stretched away until its green became drab in the far distance. It was alive, and yet lifeless, full of color, yet colorless; intangible mystery lurked in its contrast, a mystery of light and shadow and tints. Strange, dreaming, lovely, it lay beneath the intense, blue sky. Underfoot, the ground was bright with young grass and flowers, through which the light wind rippled soundlessly. It was only when earth and sky met and their colors merged that one caught a hint of the wild power of the prairie, its sweep, its changelessness, its passive cruelty and callousness.

— From " The Prairie," by Walter J. Muilenburg.

In the evening, and after supper, they sat in front of the shack, facing the West, and watched the sun go down under the level line at the end of the world. It was then that the menace of the prairie stood out strongest. The last light was never a benediction, but always something ominous. Its beauty was savage, over-powering. There was nothing to hide the fierce, red light. The earth stretched, level and unmarked except for a single, twisted scrub oak, dying slowly by the dry creek bed — an empty horror of unobstructed space that grew indistinct in the red dimness of approaching darkness.

— From " The Prairie," by Walter J. Muilenburg.

There they were still — the old eternal hills! How well he knew them, better than anything in the world. The lay of the land — something in that to stir the deepest feeling in a man. Low rolling hills, fold after fold, smooth, brown and autumnal, some plowed to soft earth-color, some set with cornstalks of pale tarnished gold. Along the farther ones, the woods lay like a colored cloud, brown, russet, red and purple-tinged. As he walked on the houses grew fewer; everything dwindled into pasture land. The feeling of autumn grew more poignant. There was a scent of dust in the stubble. The trees grew in scattered russet groups. One slender young cottonwood, yellow as a goldfinch and as lyric in its quality, stood in a meadow, alone. Not even spring beauty was so aching and so transient — like music fading away. Yet under everything something abiding and eternal.

— From "A Rural Community," by Ruth Suckow.

Wonderful high steep and billowing clouds were in the sky. They were like vast mounds and towers of tarnished well-lit silver. He sat on the side of the plow and looked over toward the part of the orchard at which he would finish his plowing. The green of an oats field beyond was visible under the apple-boughs. It was even now beginning to take on a gray misty tinge. Soon the oats field would seem an unbelievable blue-gray cloud, glimpsed from beneath the apple trees. In those days the granite of oats would call the eye throughout all the country. The heads would seem to dance in the high sunlight, and fields of wheat would bow and surge in amber-lit crests. The rows of young corn would be arching to either side and touching, black-green and healthy. The smell of it, as he

cultivated and the horses nipped off pieces of the heavy leaves, would be more sweet than that of flowers, and more bland. The year would pass on, the harvesting of wheat, of barley and oats, fall-plowing again, threshings, the cutting and husking of corn, the picking of apples in this same orchard. Yes, one could see the beauty of it distantly, but when the time came he would be numbed to all with toil.

— From "Mist-Green Oats," by Raymond Knister.

APPENDIX VII

Style

The lamp had a tin reflector, brown with rust and covered with dust. The people who went up the stairway followed with their feet the feet of many who had gone before. The soft boards of the stairs had yielded under the pressure of feet and deep hollows marked the way.

— From the story "Death" by Sherwood Anderson, in *Winesburg, Ohio* (Boni and Liveright, Modern Library).

The crowd swept together like leaves of the aspen blown by the four winds into one heap. From the village of Nahum it gathered, from the sea's edge, and from the fields along the road into the country beyond, leaving the village empty, the fishing boats riding idly at anchor, and the fields stripped of husbandmen although the month was Sivan, season of wheat harvest.

— From the story "The Scarlet One," by George Carver, in *Stories from the Midland* (Alfred A. Knopf).

Glancing round, she saw all the windows giving on to the lawn were curtainless and dark. The house had a sterile appearance, as if it were still used, but not inhabited. A shadow seemed to go over her. She went across the lawn towards the garden, through an arch of crimson ramblers, a gate of colour. There beyond lay the soft blue sea within the bay, misty with morning,

and the farthest headland of black rock jutting dimly out between blue and blue of the sky and water. Her face began to shine, transfigured with pain and joy. At her feet the garden fell steeply, all a confusion of flowers, and away below was the darkness of tree-tops covering the beck.

— From the story "The Shadow in the Rose Garden," by D. H. Lawrence, in *Georgian Stories* (G. P. Putnam's Sons).

The horses stood with hanging heads. It was still. The man in the carriage stretched himself out, folded his arms. He felt the sun beat on his knees. His head was sunk on his breast. "Hish, hish," sounded from the sea. The wind sighed in the valley and was quiet. He felt himself, lying there, a hollow man, a parched, withered man, as it were, of ashes. And the sea sounded, "Hish, hish."

It was then that he saw the tree, that he was conscious of its presence just inside a garden gate. It was an immense tree with a round, thick silver stem and a great arc of copper leaves that gave back the light and yet were sombre. There was something beyond the tree — a whiteness, a softness, an opaque mass, half-hidden, — with delicate pillars. As he looked at the tree he felt his breathing die away and he became part of the silence. It seemed to grow, it seemed to expand in the quivering heat until the great carved leaves hid the sky, and yet it was motionless. Then from within its depths or from beyond there came the sound of a woman's voice. A woman was singing. The warm untroubled voice floated upon the air, and it was all part of the silence as he was part of it. Suddenly, as the voice rose, soft, dreaming, gentle,

he knew that it would come floating to him from the hidden leaves and his peace was shattered. What was happening to him? Something stirred in his breast. Something dark, something unbearable and dreadful pushed in his bosom, and like a great weed it floated, rocked . . . it was warm, stifling. He tried to struggle to tear at it, and at the same moment — all was over. Deep, deep, he sank into the silence, staring at the tree and waiting for the voice that came floating, falling, until he felt himself enfolded.

— From the story "The Escape," by Katherine Mansfield, in the volume *Bliss* (Alfred A. Knopf).

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